2. ENLISTMENT AND RECRUITMENT

This chapter provides a close look at the enlistment and recruitment decision. It first reviews the policy approaches adopted in other militaries (primarily the U.S.), as well as the estimates of their effectiveness. This is followed by a description of the main features of the Italian recruiting system and its performance in recent years.

2.1 THEORY AND FINDINGS FROM PAST RESEARCH

Recruitment policy tools

A large body of literature on the enlistment decision in an all-volunteer environment has been developed mainly in the United States since the 1970s. From this analysis, two critical policy levers emerge:

• Compensation (wages and non-monetary benefits including human capital incentives);
• The structure and operation of the recruiting establishment.

1. Compensation

Asch (1993, p.14) defined compensation as "the sum of pecuniary (cash) benefits and the value to the individual of nonpecuniary benefits." Asch's work on the relationship between compensation and the enlistment decision was based on Rosen's 1992 occupational choice theory model,12 which assumes that the economy is formed by a civilian and military sector. Prospective recruits consider the monetary and non-monetary advantages of each sector. Enlistment occurs when the difference between military and civilian wages is greater than an individuals' net preference for civilian life.13 Part of the recruiting

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11 A large portion of section 2.1 is based on studies first summarized by Warner and Asch (1995).
13 Other things equal, an individual may prefer civilian life because of the hardship and discipline associated with a military career. Having said that, a military position can bring significant nonpecuniary benefits, including "pride of service to one's country, the opportunity for travel, and possibly a more stable employment" (Warner and Asch, 1995, p.352).
challenge for the Army, therefore, is to devise the right set of incentives that induce a sufficient number of able individuals to prefer military to civilian life. To be sure, military pay can be changed in order to affect enlistments across the board. But other incentives are targeted to particular sets of soldiers, and are linked to notions of “human capital.” 14 One could posit that the more transferable the skill set learned on the military job, the greater will be individual propensity to join. It therefore follows that the military may need to provide greater inducements to those who are unlikely to acquire much transferable human capital, perhaps because of their assignment to low-skilled tasks. The enlistment bonus program in the U.S. is based on this premise, since it is designed to encourage individuals to join in those “critical” skill specialties that are less transferable, such as combat arms (Kirby and Thie, 1996, p.131). Educational benefits provide another human capital development incentive in the United States, and like the enlistment bonus program they are only offered to those enlisting in particular skill areas.

2. Recruiting establishment

Research in the field of military labor supply points to the importance of other factors shaping the enlistment decision—including the military’s own recruitment efforts. In fact, the military has a number of recruitment levers that can be manipulated to stimulate supply, including advertising and other promotional activities. In countries such as United States, the use of recruiters also constitutes a critical policy tool. Recruiters are typically deployed in particular geographical areas; they are evaluated on their ability to meet quotas based on the personal characteristics of prospective enlistees (e.g. quality and gender). To stimulate recruiter productivity, a number of incentives have been devised, including improved promotion chances and official commendations for good performance (Oken and Asch, 1997). 15

14 The concept of human capital and its impact on force productivity is also considered in Chapter 4.
15 As mentioned below, recruiter management is critical in determining the types of individuals who ultimately enlist because recruiter behavior is highly sensitive to quotas and incentive plan structure.
The programs implemented by the recruitment establishment can also help shape society’s views on military service. They can target individuals who play an “influencer” role in a youth’s decision to enlist. In fact, research by Orvis et al. (1996) has demonstrated that enlistment choices are significantly affected by such factors as the advice of family and friends and the public image of the military as an institution.

**Empirical models of manpower supply**

A host of econometric models have been developed to examine the effects of the policy levers mentioned above, controlling for exogenous factors such as unemployment. Such studies make an explicit distinction between low and high quality enlistment—a concept that is briefly introduced below.16

**The impact of quality on enlistment decisions**

Enlistment models that differentiate between low- and high-quality soldiers assume that the supply of high-quality soldiers is upward-sloping—that is, all other things being equal, increasing enlistments by moving along the supply curve will imply an increase in the factor that determines the supply—such as wages, bonuses, recruiters, and educational benefits (see supply curve $S_{HQ}$ in Figure 2.1, which maps supply as a function of wages). This implies that high-quality recruits are supply constrained—that is, there are fewer high-quality individuals than low-quality individuals relative to the Army’s total demand, and therefore the Army has to increase pay in order to recruit an extra high-quality soldier.

In contrast, one could assume that at the extreme the supply of low-quality soldiers is perfectly elastic—or flat ($S_{LQ}$)—meaning that the Army could recruit as many of these soldiers as it wished without an increase in recruiting resources (e.g., it could still offer the going wage, or maintain the same number of recruiters).17 Again, this has to

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16 The U.S. services emphasize the recruitment of "high quality" youth, defined as high-school degree graduates who score in the upper half of the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score distribution.

17 Supply elasticity is a measure of the responsiveness of supply to various factors, such as wages. It is defined as the percentage change in quantity supplied relative to a given percentage change in the
do with the relatively large number of low-quality individuals compared to the quantity the Army would like to hire.

As Figure 2.1 shows, in extreme cases and holding every other factor constant, a given numerical increase in recruits ($\Delta D$) can be obtained at the going wage ($W_0$) by drawing exclusively from the low-quality pool, or at $W_1$ by relying entirely from the high-quality pool. At wage $W_2$, the Army could meet its increased volunteer goals with a mix of high- and low-quality recruits.

**Figure 2.1 Low- and High-quality supply curves as functions of wages**

![Graph showing supply curves](image)

**Methodology and estimates**

Studies on enlistment supply over the last three decades span two generations (Warner and Asch, 1995, p. 355). First-generation frameworks did not explicitly factor in recruiter behavior as a determinant of enlistment.\(^\text{18}\) Second-generation studies such as those undertaken by Dertouzos (1985), Daula and Smith (1985), Polich, Dertouzos and Press (1986), and Bernes and Paula (1993) instead held recruiter effort constant (Appendix A explores in detail the methodological differences between these models).

\[^{18}\text{The wage elasticity of supply can be formally expressed as: } \varepsilon_s = \frac{dx}{dp} \frac{p}{x} \text{ where } p \text{ is the wage and } x \text{ is the amount of labor supplied. An inelastic supply implies that the percentage change in labor supplied is less than the percentage change in the wage.} \]

All past research confirms the importance of pay and unemployment as determinants of enlistments; more recent studies estimated relative pay (the ratio of civilian to military wages) elasticity as centering around 0.5 to 1.0 (see Table 2.1 below). In other words, on average a 10% pay increase relative to civilian wages would bring about a 5 to 10% increase in the supply of high-quality recruits. Table 2.1 also highlights the fact the number of recruiters has a large effect on the number of high-quality enlistments, with elasticity estimates of around 0.5. National advertising instead has smaller elasticities, at around 0.05 to 0.10 (Dertouzos, 1989, and Polich et al., 1986).

Of the human-capital related incentives, educational benefits are more successful in inducing high-quality enlistments than enlistment bonuses. The establishment of the U.S. Army College Fund in 1982 led to a 9% increase in high-quality enlistments, while enlistment bonuses in the mid-1980s boosted entries of high-quality soldiers by about 5%. At the same time, however, it appears that enlistment bonuses may be superior at stimulating enlistment in particularly critical (and difficult-to-fill) skill areas (Warner and Asch, 1995, pp. 357-358).

Reliable estimates of supply elasticities from other countries are rare. One of the most interesting comparative studies was undertaken by Withers (1978), who estimated enlistment supply for the U.K., Canada, Australia, and the U.S. using data from 1967 to 1973. However, viable estimates could only be calculated for the U.K., since the relatively short time horizon of the analysis and multicollinearity rendered the remaining data less useful. In the case of the British Army, pay and unemployment elasticities were estimated at 1.46 and 0.90, respectively.

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19 On the other hand, Polich et al. (1986) discovered that the benefits of advertising persist even after the end of a particular campaign. Originally cited in Warner and Asch (1995) p. 357.

20 These estimates were obtained through experimentation. The effect of educational benefits on high-quality enlistments was gauged through the Educational Assistance Test Program (EATP), conducted in 1980 and 1981 (Fernandez, 1992). The Enlistment Bonus Test (EBT) was instead run from 1982 to 1984 to identify how such enlistment would vary according to different bonus structures (Polich, Dertouzos, and Press, 1986). Both experiments were conducted on a national scale and included control groups. Originally cited in Warner and Asch, 1995, p.357.
Table 2.1 High-quality enlistment supply elasticity estimates (based on Berner and Daula–1993)\textsuperscript{21}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay (relative to civilian)</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Recruiters</th>
<th>Advertising</th>
<th>Educat. benefits</th>
<th>Enlistment Bonus</th>
<th>Low-quality enlistments</th>
<th>High-quality goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daula and Smith (1985)</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.02 to .11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polich, Dertouzos and Press (1985)</td>
<td>-0.55\textsuperscript{22}</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldberg (1991)</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kearl, Horne and Gilroy (1990)</td>
<td>0.15-0.62</td>
<td>0.57-0.65</td>
<td>0.48-1.15</td>
<td>0.43-0.72</td>
<td>0.16-0.17</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berner and Daula (1993)</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{21} Adapted from Warner and Asch, 1995,p. 358.

\textsuperscript{22} Civilian pay only, not relative military to civilian pay.
The cost-effectiveness of recruitment tools

Based on the elasticity estimates reported above, one can compute how recruitment policy levers compare in terms of their marginal cost— that is, how much more would have to be spent for each in order to obtain an additional high-quality recruit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Estimated marginal cost (pay=100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry basic pay</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlistment bonus</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National advertising</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiters</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational benefits</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 shows that pay is the least cost-effective resource; this has to do with the fact that increasing pay for the marginal recruit cannot be undertaken without an identical increase for all of those that would have joined at a lower wage. All of the more targeted incentives are significantly less costly at the margin, and advertising, recruiters and educational benefits are clearly most cost effective (when effectiveness in understood in terms of high-quality enlistments).

2.2 ENLISTMENT AND RECRUITMENT: THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE

This section explores in some detail the enlistment term structure available to those wishing to join the Italian Army and the types of recruitment incentives used to target prospective entrants. It also focuses on the performance of the recruiting establishment since the late 1990s, when the Army began to devote more attention to the recruitment of volunteers.

Enlistment terms

The structure of enlistment terms has changed significantly over the last five years. Prior to 1996, junior enlisted volunteers were recruited from the conscript ranks for renewable two-year stints, but

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23 Table adapted from Warner and Asch (1995), pp. 359-360.
without an explicit career path. Planners realized that recruiting and retaining a large number of volunteers would not be successful unless soldiers are offered significant opportunities for career advancement and development. The government sought to address this requirement by revolutionizing the grade and promotion structure for enlisted soldiers with a legislative decree issued in 1995.  

This law specified that junior enlisted volunteers (Volontari in Ferma Breve; henceforth referred to as VFB) be recruited for three-year terms, with the possibility of two 2-year renewals. At the end of their term, a given number of VFBs are selected to join the career force (promotion is in theory a function of merit). Starting in 2002, VFBs will be recruited for 5-year terms. The Italian Army also allows for the lateral entry as a Marshal, a NCO personnel category further discussed in the following chapter. More recently, a new type of volunteer--Volontario in Ferma Annuale, henceforth referred to as VFA--has also been created. VFAs serve for 12 months and are paid less than VFBs, although they have preferential access to the VFB grades once their term is over. Essentially, these are draft-induced volunteers who decide to enlist for a term 2 months longer than that of conscripts, but benefit from a considerably higher level of pay. The Army relies on VFAs to (1) fill recruitment gaps (primarily shortfalls of conscripts relative to the planned yearly goals), (2) increase the base of potentially deployable troops (although VFAs would not be sent to high-conflict environments), and (3) lure very short-term soldiers into becoming VFBs. 

**Recruiting process**

Recruitment processes for VFBs, Marshals, and VFAs differ markedly. Those wishing to enter service for the 5-year long VFB enlistment term have to be between the ages of 17 to 22. Since 1998 prospective recruits participate in centralized contests administered three times a year. Prior to 1998, the Army had instead been exclusively recruiting individuals through service-specific channels. Army-only recruiting continues, but at a much reduced scale compared to the interservice

24 Legislative Decree 196, May 12, 1995. The promotion system outlined in this law is examined in Chapter 3.
recruiting contests (in 2000 the Army recruited 800 VFBs through its own channels, while in 2001 it plans to recruit an additional 1,200).

The new VFB recruitment process is jointly managed by the three Services, which attempt to coordinate the effort with police forces. Its centralized nature stems from the widely held belief that the armed forces will only attain a sufficient number of enlistments if they offer the prospect of a secure public sector job to those who successfully complete their tour as VFBs. In fact, the non-military institutions involved in the process should in theory commit themselves to selecting a target number of individuals each year and then "loaning" these recruits to the military as VFBs.

For each VFB contest, the three services and other governmental bodies decide on (1) the number of individuals to be recruited for each service, and (2) the ultimate destination of that recruit after his/her term is over. The Army only screens applicants who have indicated their desire to potentially become career enlisted soldiers at the end of the first term. The police forces are instead responsible for the selection of recruits who have chosen these institutions as their preferred future career "homes."

The recruitment process for VFBs begins with a standard application form, which can either be submitted to a local military office or to the Ministry of Defense in Rome. Those deemed eligible to take part in the contest and who sign up for an Army career are then invited to a national test and evaluation facility in Central Italy for an initial screening multiple-choice test. Those who pass such test then undergo a series physical fitness, medical and aptitude tests.

Lateral entry contests for Marshals are instead organized once a year, and eligible individuals have to be between the ages of 17 and

25 These include the National Police force, the paramilitary Carabinieri, the Coast Guard, and the Park Service.

26 For instance, in the third contest of 1999, the Army offered 2,389 VFB slots: out of these, 1,203 were reserved for individuals wishing to become career soldiers in the Army, while the remainder were allocated to applicants who instead declared their interest in leaving the Service after the first term to join institutions such as the state police or the Carabinieri, Italy's paramilitary police force.
Unlike VFBs, the Army manages its own Marshals contests since this personnel category has a career-long (approximately 37 years) and service-specific term of enlistment. The recruitment process for Marshals is structurally similar, but more competitive, than the one described for VFBs.

Recruitment for VFAs is instead much less structured—responsibility for screening and enlisting applicants is delegated to the regimental level, and the prerequisites are less strict than those used for VFBs (they are virtually the same as those applied to conscripts). Interestingly, recruitment is managed on a first-come, first-serve basis: each regiment’s designated VFA slots are filled according to the order the applications are received. The Army decides how many VFAs need to be recruited on a monthly basis.

The Army’s recruitment policy tools

**Compensation**

VFBs receive approximately 19 million liras (Lit. 19m) each month—after tax, this amounts to approximately Lit. 14.5m. After the first year, there is a 7% increase which brings after-tax pay to approximately Lit. 15.7m. An entry-grade Marshal is paid as much as a VFB for the first two years while he/she is enrolled at the NCO academy. VFAs instead receive slightly less—Lit. 9.6m per year after tax. The Army also provides an exit bonus for all those VFBs who successfully complete their term, amounting to Lit. 9.2m—or about 40% of their yearly salary.

For VFBs, military pay does not appear to be grossly over or under the median of the income distribution for military age youth (Table 2.3).

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27 Women can be accessed laterally as Marshals until the age of 29.
28 After-tax income is estimated by subtracting from gross income the taxable amount as specified by the Italian Ministry of Finance’s income tax tables, which vary by income brackets (Italian Finance Ministry, 2000). Other taxes and/or exemptions are not included in this rather rough calculation.
29 The career earnings profile of a laterally-entering Marshal is substantially greater than a VFB, however (see Chapter 3).
Table 2.3 Estimates of the after-tax income distribution for males 17/22 years of age, 1998 (K Lire, adjusted for nominal wage growth)30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decile</th>
<th>After-tax Income: MALES (n=180)</th>
<th>After-tax Income: MALES &amp; FEMALES (n=293)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>8,176,000</td>
<td>8,176,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>10,220,000</td>
<td>10,220,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>12,264,000</td>
<td>12,264,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>14,716,800</td>
<td>14,308,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>16,352,000</td>
<td>15,330,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>18,396,000</td>
<td>18,396,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>19,418,000</td>
<td>19,418,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>21,257,600</td>
<td>20,440,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>22,760,962</td>
<td>23,506,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: based on Bank of Italy data

The salary of a VFB is roughly between the fortieth percentile and the median of the civilian income distribution at a national level. Military wages are very likely to place even higher in the income distributions of Southern youth, since according to Bank of Italy data the median salary in the South is approximately Lit. 12m; in the North the median wage is instead at around the Lit. 18m mark. Salary for VFAs instead ranks well below the median (but is still significantly higher than the salary of conscripts).

As mentioned above, the non-pecuniary benefits relevant at the recruitment point are mainly based on the prospect of safe employment. Overseas deployments, which have been on the increase in the last years, provide another set of relevant monetary and non-monetary benefits. Junior enlisted volunteers benefit from a monthly deployment allowance of about Lit. 3.5m per month. Moreover, surveys show that overseas deployments are an important source of satisfaction and motivation for

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30 Income adjusted for nominal wage growth for comparative purposes (nominal wage growth data taken from the Economist Intelligence Unit's Country Profile on Italy (2000). The income distribution presented here is a sub-sample of a large household survey conducted on a yearly basis by the Bank of Italy. For more summary results and a methodological discussion that includes the limitations of this data, refer to Appendix B.
both those serving and those wishing to serve (Battistelli, 1996; Battistelli et al., 1999).31

The Army does not offer educational benefits—such as tuition support or an allowance for living expenses while studying—to VFAs or VFBs. Marshals instead do receive educational benefits during the first two years of service, which are spent at the NCO academy: the training and coursework leads to a “shortened” university diploma. Financial incentives for recruitment do not include signing bonuses for particular skills areas, although the compensation system differentiates somewhat between different combat specialties (more on this in Chapter 3).

To increase the human capital development prospects of its junior enlisted soldiers, the Army has organized a set of training programs for junior enlisted volunteers, called Euroformazione. These programs were originally instituted in 1997 with the support of the European Union to impart conscripts with foreign language (English), information technology, and other professional skills.32 Euroformazione has been extended to VFBs, and in the 12-month period ranging from January 22, 2000 and January 23, 2001, more than 700 courses were offered to VFBs, with approximately 9,000 students attending (Italian Joint Staff, 2001).

Recruitment establishment

The Army has only recently begun to prepare for the task of attracting and eventually recruiting large number of volunteers on an ongoing basis. To do so, it has created an agency in charge of all advertising and promotional activities (Agenzia Promozione Reclutamenti, or APR). Some of APR’s activities include advertising aimed at recasting the hitherto unfavorable image the Army has among military-age youth, as well as ads that inform the target population of upcoming contests and their terms and conditions.33

31 Overseas peacekeeping deployments have also helped improve the image of the Army among Italian youth since the mid-1990s. See Moriero, (2000).

32 Sixteen technical professions are directly targeted, and include electrician, carpenter, and mechanic. At the end of the course, the student receives a certificate which allows him/her to apply for a license to practice the profession once he/she leaves the force.

33 According to the 2000 Army’s communication plan, Italian youth see the Army as relatively weak in terms of military capability,
This agency has organized other activities, such as itinerant Army exhibitions targeting beach communities during the summertime (according to Army recruiting planners, these have generated substantial interest among youth). There are also plans to involve a designated group of Army personnel in a series of middle/high school conferences. The latest Army communication plan also calls for the establishment of "military points" throughout Italy which will bring the service closer to prospective applicants and will help disseminate information on enlistment and careers (APR, 2000).

Currently the Army does not systematically consider personnel quality when making plans for recruitment. Army planners argue that qualitative standards are built into the examination process, but there are no recruitment goals based on a commonly used quality scale. There is also no sign that goals are specified for particular skill sets (e.g., combat arms) at the point of enlistment. Moreover, there is no dedicated military staff whose main task is recruitment at the "operational" level. Existing and planned outreach activities primarily concern the dissemination of information and promotion, rather than actual recruitment. In sum, the Italian Army seems to be taking a relatively passive stance when dealing with the supply of enlisted personnel.

2.3 RECENT RECRUITMENT PERFORMANCE, TRENDS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Partly as a result of such passivity, the performance of the military's recruiting establishment has been checkered. Recruitment problems began to arise when the services substantially expanded their yearly volunteer enlistment goals in the mid-to-late 1990s. This section provides a brief account of recruiting trends and of the structure of the recruiting process.

especially when compared to allied forces such as the UK, France, and Germany, and the U.S. Is it often perceived of as a badly managed, wasteful force. Youth also appear to be little informed about what an Army career can offer (APR, 2000).
VFB Recruitment

The Army has been experiencing significant problems since 1998, the first year of inter-service recruiting (see Figure 2.2). In that year the number of applications was even lower than the available slots, and only a fraction of the applicant pool was actually recruited (the rest of the intake for that year—about 6,000 soldiers—was secured through an Army-service contest, which had laxer selection standards). The situation seems to have improved in 1999, with a much higher applicant-to-slot ratio.34

Figure 2.2 Joint VFB recruiting contests, 1998-1999

source: based on Army General Staff data

Having said that, the increase in the number of applications relative to the available slots does not automatically lead to larger numbers of high-quality recruits. As mentioned in the "recruitment process leaks" sub-section below, the number of individuals that actually undergo the selection process is a significantly smaller fraction of those who apply. Since there is no systematic screening of applications prior to their filing, there exists a possibility that the increase in applicants is driven by a greater supply of low-quality or otherwise undesirable individuals. Indeed, some Army planners have

34 To explain the particularly dismal performance of 1998, Army planners cite the fact that many of the flaws affecting the process were due to its infancy: the military was not successful at reaching potentially interested youth prior to the contest; the selection criteria were not properly calibrated, and bureaucratic coordination within and across each service and police forces proved difficult.
expressed their concerns that selection standards are “not overly demanding” (Castelluccio, 1999).

Figure 2.3 instead indicates that generally half of the individuals enlisting opt to join other police forces once their term is over. It also highlights the fact those security forces responsible for recruiting personnel loaned to the Army have not secured as many enlistments as planned--thus forcing the Army to exceed its goals and make up for the deficit. This in large part reflects the reluctance of police forces, who dislike the fact that their own personnel selection process is being constrained in order to meet the manpower needs of the military.

**Figure 2.3 Recruitment patterns by post-first-term career choice, 1999**

![Figure 2.3 Recruitment patterns by post-first-term career choice, 1999](image)

(source: based on Army General Staff data)

**Marshals recruitment**

The recruitment experience for the Marshals category has been qualitatively different than for VFBs. Relative to the few lateral entry positions offered each year, the number of applicants is staggering: in the 2000-2001 contest, 18,400 applicants competed for a mere 210 positions (the 1999-2000 contest had a comparable ratio). This is not surprising given the considerable advantages—in terms of compensation and human capital development—of becoming a Marshal immediately after high school.

**VFA Recruitment**

VFA recruitment began in 2000, and monthly demand for these recruits has roughly oscillated between 1,000 and 1,500. By the end of
2000 more than 13,000 individuals enlisted as VFAs. According to the results of surveys administered to VFAs, it appears that a significant number of them has chosen this route as a preparatory step for a career in the Army (even larger numbers indicated draft-related rationales, such as better salary and choice of location).

**Recruitment process leaks**

One of the principal recruitment problems may well have to do with the management of the process after applications are filed. The data presented in Figure 2.4 was obtained by following a group of applicants in the 2000 Marshals contest. It appears that more than half of those applicants deemed acceptable drop out before the first test is administered. Based on Army General Staff data, the attrition pattern for VFB applicants should be largely the same—if not worse. Another looming problem is the fact that the selection process takes a whole year from end to end because of bureaucratic and infrastructure bottlenecks.

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35 The potential that VFAs have of becoming an important flow into the stock of longer-term volunteers is underscored by data available for the additional recruitment contest organized in 2000 (the only one for which it is possible to reconstruct the background of applicants). These show that applications from VFAs easily surpassed those of civilians and conscripts. See Favara and Zizzo (2000) and Sgritta (2000).
To be sure, some attrition during the selection process is natural (and even desirable) since individuals who apply may also be pursuing other career options and may not be truly motivated to join the military. However, such a high loss rate may be in large part affected by the centralized, bureaucratic, and applicant-unfriendly format of the selection process. In fact, past contests (1995/1996) that allowed applicants to take the first exam in locations closer to their homes (there were three exam sites—in the North, Center, and South) saw pre-exam attrition rates drop to 20-25% (Colimberti and Masini, 2000).

Regional representativeness

Finally, recent recruiting data collected by the Army points to the disproportionate number of Southern applicants. In fact, while Southern youth makes up 40% of the country’s military-age male cohort, it generally accounts for 70% of the applications. Equally significant is the lack of representation of Northern youth, which contributed 5% of the total number of applications submitted in 1998, despite the fact that it accounts for one-third of the eligible cohort.36 Such regional representativeness is even starker when one examines the regional background of actual VFB recruits. Army data shows how three Southern regions—Sicily, Apulia, and Campania—contain a third of military-age youth, yet they account for two-thirds of VFBs currently in service. Relatively populous Northern regions such as Lombardy, Piedmont and

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36 This trend is even starker when one examines the regional background of actual VFB recruits. Army data shows how three Southern regions—Sicily, Apulia, and Campania—contain a third of military-age youth, yet they account for two-thirds of VFBs currently in service. Relatively populous Northern regions such as Lombardy, Piedmont and
imbalances are caused by several factors, including the higher unemployment rates and lower wages in the South. They currently remain below the policy horizon, and although the debate over regional representativeness will never assume racial or ethnic overtones, the rhetoric could well escalate during a time of crisis (especially in the case of heavy losses).

Veneto jointly contribute less than 4% of total VFBs (Italian Army General Staff, 1999).